

**To:** Abrams, Dan[Abrams.Dan@epa.gov]; Purchia, Liz[Purchia.Liz@epa.gov]; Harrison, Melissa[Harrison.Melissa@epa.gov]; Lee, Monica[Lee.Monica@epa.gov]; Allen, Laura[Allen.Laura@epa.gov]; StClair, Christie[StClair.Christie@epa.gov]; Hull, George[Hull.George@epa.gov]  
**From:** Ludwigsen, Emily  
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**The Denver Post**

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[http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci\\_28614946/epa-taking-damage-claims-toxic-spill-animas-river](http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_28614946/epa-taking-damage-claims-toxic-spill-animas-river)

**EPA taking damage claims for toxic spill in Animas River**

Tom McGhee

August 10, 11:01 AM

The Environmental Protection Agency is taking damage claims from residents near southwest Colorado waterways where the agency was responsible for a spill that sent a plume of contaminated and discolored water into the waterways.

In a release Monday, five days after 3 million gallons of polluted water spilled from the inactive Gold King Mine, the EPA spells out a process for submitting a claim for "personal injury or property damage caused by U.S. government actions."

Wastewater containing contaminants including cadmium, arsenic, copper, lead and zinc began pouring into waterways after an EPA-supervised cleanup crew accidentally breached a debris dam inside the mine. The EPA initially reported 1 million gallons spilled into the river.

On Sunday, the agency revised that to 3 million gallons.

Wastewater and sludge poured into Cement Creek and from there into the Animas River, a tributary of the San Juan, and the plume of contamination has also run into that river.

A flyover of the river system on Monday by the EPA found that conditions from Farmington, N.M., north to Durango, appear to be improving. "While the San Juan River remains discolored, the leading edge of the contaminant plume is no longer visible," the release said.

The mine continues to discharge about 500 gallons per minute into settling ponds where it is treated before it goes into Cement Creek, and carried into the river.

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### **Environmental Protection**

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<https://eponline.com/articles/2015/08/10/city-declares-emergency-as-spill-estimate-triples.aspx>

## **City Declares Emergency as Spill Estimate Triples**

August 10

The city of Durango, Colo., has declared a local state of emergency in response to the Aug. 5 spill of wastewater from the abandoned Gold King Mine in Silverton. An EPA crew caused the spill, and a local EPA official on Aug. 9 reported that a river gauge showed 3 million gallons spilled into the Animas River, which is three times more than initially estimated.

Some of the wastewater has reached New Mexico.

Durango's city manager, Ron LeBlanc, signed the emergency declaration Aug. 9, reporting that the EPA-caused spill "may be far in excess" of the city's resources. The declaration says the Animas River is a municipal water source for about 23,000 city residents, and the city's utility department had to stop pumping water from the river on Aug. 5 to prevent contamination of the municipal water system.

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### **NPR**

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/08/10/431223703/epa-says-it-released-3-million-gallons-of-contaminated-water-into-river>

## **EPA Says It Released 3 Million Gallons Of Contaminated Water Into River**

Bill Chappell

August 10, 8:42 AM

In an event that has led to health warnings and turned a river orange, the Environmental Protection Agency says one of its safety teams accidentally released contaminated water from a mine into the Animas River in southwest Colorado.

The spill, which sent heavy metals, arsenic and other contaminants into a waterway that flows into the San Juan National Forest, occurred Wednesday. The EPA initially said 1 million gallons of wastewater had been released, but that figure has risen sharply.

From member station KUNC, Stephanie Paige Ogburn reports for our Newscast unit:

"The EPA now estimates 3 million gallons of wastewater spilled from the mine into the Animas River. They also confirmed lead concentrations had spiked over 3,500 times historic levels just above the town of Durango.

"Debra McKean, a toxicologist with the agency, says levels peak and then decrease as the contamination flows downriver.

" 'Yes, those numbers are high and they are scary because they seem so high,' she said, 'especially compared to the baseline numbers.'

"New test results show significant increases in arsenic levels, and some mercury has been detected. Durango and La Plata County have declared a state of emergency."

Officials are warning residents, farmers and outdoor enthusiasts to avoid the water. The spill occurred at Cement Creek, releasing contaminants that will eventually make their way downstream toward New Mexico and Utah, in a river system that links to the Colorado River and Arizona.

Update at 2:30 p.m. ET: Contaminants Reach New Mexico

The National Park Service says that the plume of wastewater has now reached the San Juan River in New Mexico, NPR's Howard Berkes reports.

Howard adds that the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area has issued a statement saying, "Most river sediments will settle out of the water when the river current slows at Lake Powell."

GCNRA spokeswoman Cynthia Sequanna tells Howard that in the slackwater of the lake, "We expect most sediments will drop out in the 40-mile section of the San Juan River that is part of Lake Powell."

The Colorado River also runs through Lake Powell in that same section.

Our original post continues:

After waiting a day to reveal the incident, the EPA has been criticized by those who say it didn't announce the accident soon enough. EPA officials say it took time to realize the magnitude of the spill.

The EPA team had been working on the Gold King Mine near Silverton, an area that has many disused mines.

KUNC reports, "Scientists say it's the largest untreated mine drainage in the state, and problematic concentrations of zinc, copper, cadmium, iron, lead, manganese and aluminum are choking off the Upper Animas River's ecosystem."

The station also explains how the mines became sources of contaminated water:

"For most of the West's history, miners were basically allowed to run willy-nilly across the landscape, burrowing for gold, silver or other valuable minerals. According to Ronald Cohen, an environmental engineer at the Colorado School of Mines, whenever you dig into a mountain, 'at some point you are going to hit water.'

"That water, when it runs through the rocks in a mine, hits a mineral called pyrite, or iron sulfide. It reacts with air and pyrite to form sulfuric acid and dissolved iron. That acid then continues through the mine, dissolving other heavy metals, like copper and lead. Eventually, you end up with water that's got high levels of a lot of undesirable materials in it."

Reporting on how the breach occurred, Colorado Public Radio says that an EPA team used heavy equipment to dig into a dam at the Gold King Mine site, hoping to install a drain pipe. But because of the volume of water and the dam's makeup of soil and not rock, it spewed zinc, iron and contaminants into a runoff channel that leads to the nearby creek.

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